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MEXICAN PRESIDENT ADDRESSES JOINT SESSION OF U.S. CONGRESS

President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa

(Speech—translated, but unedited text; May 20, 2010)

IT is a great honor to stand before you today.

I would like to thank Congress and the American People for this invitation.

I want to express my gratitude to all of you here who have supported Mexico during very challenging times. I also salute the Mexican Americans and all Latinos who work every day for the prosperity of this great nation. Mexico is a young country but a very old nation. Our roots go back thousands of years. However, this year is especially significant for us.

We are celebrating the Bicentennial of our Independence, two hundred years of being proudly free and proudly Mexican. At that time, Mexico was the first nation to abolish slavery in the whole of continental America.

And it is exactly one hundred years since the Mexican Revolution, a revolution against oppression, a revolution for justice and democracy.

As you can see, Mexico was founded on the same values and principles as the United States of America.

We are very proud of this past.

However, the Mexican people and their government are focused on the future.

That is why Mexico is a country in a continuous process of transformation. We are determined to change, and we are taking the decisions that are going to make Mexico a more prosperous democracy.

ENSURING SECURITY

One of the main changes taking place in Mexico is our commitment to firmly establish the rule of law. That is why we are deploying the full force of the State to confront organized crime with determination and courage.

Let me be clear, this fight is not only and not mainly about stopping the drug trade. It is first and foremost a drive to guarantee the security of Mexican families, who are under threat from the abuses and the vicious acts of criminals.

As I told the Mexican people in my inaugural speech, restoring public security will not be easy and will not be quick.

It will take time; it will take money and, unfortunately, to our deep sorrow, human lives as well.

This is a battle that has to be fought, because the future of our families is at stake. But, I told them, you can be sure of one thing. This is a battle that, united, we the Mexican people will win.

We cannot ignore the fact that the challenge to our security has roots on both sides of the border. At the end of the day its origin is the high demand for drugs here.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has said "We accept our share of the responsibility. . . we know that the demand for drugs drives much of this illicit trade."

This is symbolic of our new relationship. We have moved from the suspicion and the mutual recrimination of the past to the cooperation and mutual understanding of the present.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate President Obama for his recent initiative to reduce the consumption of drugs. I hope, for the good of both nations and the entire hemisphere, that this succeeds.

Now let me tell you what Mexico is doing to confront and overcome this problem.

First, we have not hesitated to use all the power of the state, including the federal police and the Armed Forces, in order to support the local governments that are facing the greatest threat from organized crime.

This is a temporary measure to restore order. The goal is to provide local governments with time and opportunity to rebuild and strengthen their security and judicial institutions.

Second, we are weakening the financial and operational capabilities of criminal gangs. Federal operations have led to record seizures of drugs, cash and weapons from the criminals.

We are hitting them and hitting them hard.

The Federal Forces have also arrested many important felons who are now facing Mexican justice. And we have extradited a record number of criminals to face justice in the United States.

Third, we are rebuilding our institutions and security forces, especially at the federal level. We have more than tripled the federal police budget since the beginning of my Administration and multiplied the size of its force.

We are recruiting honest young men and women with values, who are better trained, better paid and better equipped.

Fourth, we are transforming our judicial system to make it more transparent and efficient. We are moving towards open and oral trials that are the basis of your own judicial system.

And fifth, we have set up social programs to prevent young people from turning to crime, including prevention and treatment for addictions.

ASSAULT WEAPONS

As you can see, Mexico is doing everything it can to fight this threat and to secure our common future. We are fulfilling our duty as a good neighbor, taking care of business on our side of the border.

The U.S. is also helping. Congress approved the Merida Initiative, which we greatly appreciate, and our Administrations are sharing more information than ever to fight crime.

However, there is one issue where Mexico needs your cooperation. And that is stopping the flow of assault weapons and other deadly arms across the border.

I fully respect the American Constitution. And I understand that the purpose of the Second Amendment is to guarantee good American citizens the ability to defend themselves and their nation. But believe me, many of these guns are not going to honest American hands. Instead thousands are ending up in the hands of criminals. Just to give you an idea, we have seized 75 thousand guns and assault weapons in Mexico in the last three years, and more than 80 percent of those we have been able to trace came from the United States.

And if you look carefully, you will notice that the violence started to grow a couple of years before I took office in 2006. This coincides with the lifting of the Assault Weapons Ban in 2004.

One day criminals in Mexico, having gained access to these weapons, decided to challenge the authorities in my country.

Today, these weapons are aimed by the criminals not only at rival gangs, but also at Mexican civilians and authorities.

And with all due respect if you do not regulate the sale of these weapons in the right way, nothing guarantees that criminals here in the United States, with access to the same weapons, will not in turn decide to point them at US authorities and citizens.

It is true that the U.S. Government is now carrying out operations against gun traffickers. But it is also true that there are more than 7 thousand gun shops along the border with Mexico, where almost anyone can purchase these powerful weapons.

I also fully understand the political sensitivity of this issue. But I would ask Congress to help us, and to understand how important it is for us that you enforce current laws to stem the supply of these weapons to criminals, and consider reinstating the Assault Weapons Ban.

Let us work together to end this lethal trade that threatens Mexico and your own people.

MEXICO IS STRONG

I have spoken at length on this issue, because I know it is a big concern of the American people. However, as I said, Mexico is a country undergoing deep transformations, and our relationship is about much more than just security.

We are turning our economy into one that is competitive and strong, capable of generating the jobs Mexicans need.

We are carrying out a set of structural reforms that had been ignored for decades.

We started by reforming the public pension system, and with this we guaranteed the retirement of public servants and at the same time we will save 30 points of GDP at net present value in our public finances.

We passed a tax reform that reduced our dependence on oil and allowed us to continue financing our development, keeping our public deficit close to 1% of GDP.

We also made important changes to the oil sector. This will allow Pemex to award more flexible contracts to specialized global companies and so become more efficient and increase its operational and financial capacity.

This will ensure our energy independence and strengthen regional energy security as well.

And, finally, we have increased investment in infrastructure from three to five percent of GDP, building the roads, ports, airports, and energy plants we need to modernize. This is the highest investment level in infrastructure in decades.

These changes are making us a more modern country and a stronger partner of the United States.

The energy reform, the fiscal reform, the pension reform, the investment in infrastructure, have all prepared us for a better tomorrow, but also allowed us to overcome the terrible economic crisis last year.

Then, Mexico's economy experienced its worst contraction in modern times.

However, thanks to strong regulations not one cent from taxpayers went to a single bank in Mexico. We were also able to quickly implement counter-cyclical measures such as a temporary public works program and increased credits for small businesses. In this way we were able to save hundreds of thousands of jobs.

We managed this even though we had to face a series of emergencies, any one of which would have derailed a weaker country.

We overcame the second worst drought in seventy years; the biggest ever drop in oil production; and the outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus.

So today I can come here before you and say with confidence that Mexico is standing tall, a stronger and more determined nation than ever. A nation and a people ready to face the future and take their rightful place in the world.

And the future starts now, now that the Mexican economy is recovering.

So far this year, Mexico has created more than 400,000 new jobs, the highest number ever created in a four month period. In the first quarter, the Mexican economy grew 4.3 percent and we are expecting to grow

more than 4 percent this year, which means, among other things, more wellbeing for our people and more Mexicans buying more American products.

We have made structural reforms to modernize our economy and we want more.

Today, our Congress is debating stronger anti-trust regulation as well as new labor legislation that will provide more opportunities for women and young people. And my government is auctioning both wireless frequencies and an optic fiber backbone in order to increase competition and coverage in telecoms.

Mexico is on the right track towards development.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

As well as promoting economic progress, we are improving the quality of life of all Mexicans, under the principle of equal opportunities for all.

Thanks to “Oportunidades”, an advanced poverty relief program, Mexico was able to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty from 35 to 14 million between 1996 and 2006.

This program reaches the six million poorest families, which means one in four Mexicans.

Equal opportunity means more and better education and we have provided scholarships to six million poor children of all ages. At the same time we are investing more than ever in free public universities. And today, almost 90 thousand students graduate as engineers and technicians every year.

WE WANT ALL OUR YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE THE CHANCE TO STUDY

Equal opportunity means access to health services for everyone. We have tripled the budget for Popular Health Insurance and rebuilt or renovated 1,700 public hospitals in three years.

This will allow us to reach a goal any nation would be proud of, universal health coverage by 2012. A doctor, medicine and treatment for any Mexican that needs it.

Equal opportunity means more and better education, cutting-edge poverty fighting programs, and universal health coverage.

By improving opportunities for all, we are giving people one less reason to leave Mexico.

REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS

As you can see, Mexico is a country in transformation. This is making us an even more strategic partner for the future prosperity of the American people.

The world is more global and more interconnected every day. It is also divided into large economic regions. Those regions that maximize their

comparative advantages will be the ones that succeed. And we both need to compete with Asia and with Europe.

Mexico and the United States are stronger together than they are apart. Our economic ties have made both economies stronger, and together we can renew our partnership to restore stronger and faster economic growth.

A stronger Mexico means a stronger United States. Let us not forget, Mexicans are the second largest foreign buyers of American goods. And a stronger United States, of course, means a stronger Mexico.

So I invite you to work with Mexico and consolidate North America as the most competitive region in the world.

Let us create more jobs for American workers, and more jobs for Mexican workers.

MIGRATION

Members of Congress, I am not a President who likes to see Mexicans leave our country searching for opportunities abroad. With migration, our communities lose their best people: the hardest working, the most dynamic, the leaders. Each migrant is a parent who will never see his children again.

Quiero decirles a los migrantes, a quienes están trabajando aquí por la grandeza de este país, que los admiramos, que los extrañamos, que estamos luchando por sus derechos y que estamos trabajando duro por México y por sus familias. [I want to tell the migrants, those who are working here for the greatness of this country, that we admire them, that we miss them, that we are fighting for their rights and that we are working hard for Mexico and for its families.]

Today, we are doing the best that we can do in order to reduce migration: to create opportunities and to create jobs for Mexicans in our own country, where their homes are, where their families are. As many jobs as we can. And Mexico will one day be a country in which its people will find the opportunities that today they look for outside the country.

Until then, Mexico is determined to assume its responsibility. For us migration is not just your problem. We see it as our problem as well.

My government does not favor the breaking of rules. I fully respect the right of any country to enact and enforce its own laws. But what we need today is to fix a broken system.

We favor the establishment of laws that work, and work well for us all.

So the time has come for the United States and Mexico to work together on this issue. The time has come to reduce the causes of migration, and to turn this phenomenon into one of legal, ordered and secure flows of workers and visitors.

I want to recognize the hard work and leadership of many in the Senate and the House, and of President Obama, who are determined to find responsible and objective answers to this issue. I am convinced that a com-

prehensive immigration reform is also crucial to securing our common border.

However, I strongly disagree with the recently adopted law in Arizona. It is a law that not only ignores a reality that cannot be erased by decree, but also introduces a terrible idea, using racial profiling as a basis for law enforcement.

And that is why I agree with President Obama who said the new law “carries a great amount of risk when core values that we all care about are breached.”

We cannot ignore this threat to civil rights and democracy, two core values that we share; we must find a better way to face and fix together this common problem.

CLIMATE CHANGE

And finally, the well being of both our peoples depends not only on our ability to face regional challenges but global ones as well. That is the case of climate change.

This is one of humanity’s more pressing threats. It demands the commitment of all nations both developed and developing. That is why Mexico was the first developing country to commit to emissions reduction targets.

As host of the upcoming COP 16, we are working hard to make progress in the fight against climate change. Because of your global leadership, we will need your support to make the meeting in Cancun next November a success.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Vice President, honorable members of the United States Congress.

Mexico is a country in deep transformation; we are building the future our people deserve, a future of opportunity, of freedom, of equality; a future of security, in which families and children can go out to work, study and play without fear. And, most of all, a future in which our children and their children will see their dreams come true.

I have come here as your partner and as your friend. Our two great nations are joined by geography and by history, as well as by a shared brilliant future.

I believe in the future of North America as the strongest, most prosperous region in the world. President Franklin D. Roosevelt once said that “the only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today. Let us move forward with strong and active faith.”

Let us work together in order to give our peoples the future they deserve.

Thank you very much for your invitation.

Articles

